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THE SITUATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Letter dated 26 October 1994 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of Yugoslavia to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to you concerning agenda item 39 and, upon instructions of my Government, I have the honour to state the following.

The tragic and painful civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a result of the unconstitutional and violent secession of that former republic from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia against the will of one of its constituent peoples and is not a case of aggression.

By choosing to recognize the results of the referendum that sanctioned such a secession of Bosnia and Herzegovina from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in which one of its constituent peoples, the Serbs, did not take part, the international community, disregarding the constitutional provisions, has granted the Croats and Muslims the right to decide on the fate of the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus the constitutionally guaranteed right to self-determination, one of the fundamental human rights that was granted to all other peoples of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, has been denied only to the Serb people. That was the major cause of the outbreak of the civil war.

The Bosnian Serbs had no other choice but to defend themselves in circumstances where the predominantly Muslim leadership of the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly the members of the extremist Muslim Party of Democratic Action (SDA), provoked armed skirmishes that evolved into a full-fledged interethnic, interreligious and civil war. Therefore, it can certainly not be a case of aggression by the Bosnian Serb people, who have lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries, as is put forward by the Muslim propaganda and certain international circles. The Serbs, who according to real estate registers possess about 64 per cent of the entire land of Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot be aggressors on their own territory. Being already the

victims of genocide in this century in Bosnia and Herzegovina, they simply did not allow history to be repeated and resorted to self-defence.

From the beginning of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the leadership of the Bosnian Muslims had only one aim in mind - the establishment of a unitary State based on Muslim predominance despite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina is actually a predominantly Christian State (over 55 per cent: Orthodox Serbs over 34 per cent; Roman Catholic Croats 17 per cent; and others). The basic tenets of this policy were set forth in the "Islamic Declaration" by Alija Izetbegovic, which appeared in 1971 and was reissued in 1990. In that declaration, it is stated that "... first and foremost conclusion is certainly the incompatibility of Islam with non-Islamic systems. There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions ...".

A clear confirmation that Mr. Izetbegovic and his party never departed from these aims, despite rhetorical calls for "the preservation of a multiethnic and multireligious Bosnia and Herzegovina", is a continuous drive towards the full Islamization of Bosnian society. The latest examples are the rejection of mixed marriages, the compulsory introduction of Arabic in schools, the prohibition of the sale of pork, etc. Naturally, the Serb and Croat population in Bosnia and Herzegovina could not accept such a policy, which is now severely straining the Croat-Muslim federation as well.

It should be noted that the "Muslim nationality" was a politically motivated invention of the then regime in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Muslim Slav population, actually Serbs or Croats who converted to Islam under the pressure of the Ottoman Empire, were declared to be a nation only in 1971, which is the first time in history that a religious group has been given a status of a nation.

The international community is well aware of the fact that the key decision makers on the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina subsequently conceded that such a decision was wrong and premature and that it directly contributed to the tragic chain of events that followed.

Numerous statements of other leading political figures, including former President of the Conference on Yugoslavia Lord Carrington, special representative of the Secretary-General Cyrus Vance, former Italian Foreign Minister Gianni De Michelis, the Co-Chairman of the International Conference on the former Yugoslavia, Lord Owen, as well as former United States Secretary of State James Baker, the President of the European Union, Jacques Delors, and former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas, to mention but a few, have all underlined the mistake of the premature recognition of the former Yugoslav republics before an overall political settlement was reached, which indeed triggered the civil war. Dr. Henry Kissinger, former United States Secretary of State, said in a commentary to The New York Times of 25 February 1993, that Bosnia was not a nation except in a geographical sense. He added that there were no Bosnians per se and that it remained unclear why it should have ever been thought that the same ethnic groups that had refused to coexist in a relatively large Yugoslavia would be able to coexist in tiny Bosnia. These

statements, though belated, confirmed the position that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia advocated from the very outset of the Yugoslav crisis.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has been falsely accused of involvement and territorial pretensions towards Bosnia and Herzegovina despite the fact that it repeatedly acknowledged and clearly stated in the Declaration of the Assembly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of 27 April 1992 that it did not harbour any territorial pretensions towards any of the republics of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

At the time when the sanctions were imposed against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia for alleged aggression, not a single member of the Army of Yugoslavia was outside its territory.

The international community acknowledged soon after the imposition of sanctions that the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not a consequence of the involvement of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia but a true civil war with elements of interethnic and interreligious conflict.

Unfortunately, all those facts were deliberately ignored. The sanctions against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were not only kept in place but were strengthened although the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia clearly supported all major peace initiatives of the international community, a fact that was widely recognized.

Even though the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has never accepted the reasons for which the sanctions have been imposed in the first place, it showed full cooperation with the international community and has met all conditions contained in the Security Council resolutions.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has continually invested efforts with a view to reaching a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, firmly convinced that the only solution to the Bosnian crisis is a peaceful one, that the war brings only suffering, victims and destruction and that there can be no winners in the civil war. Yugoslavia is ready to accept any solution agreed to by the warring parties on the basis of full equality and respect of the legitimate rights of all three Bosnian peoples. Consequently, it is ready to recognize the former Yugoslav republics after all outstanding issues are resolved in negotiations among the parties concerned.

It should be recalled that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia supported all peace plans, starting with the so-called Cutileiro plan for the political and territorial arrangement of Bosnia and Herzegovina, signed by all its three ethnic communities before the onset of the tragic conflict. However, even though the Muslim side accepted the plan at the beginning, it subsequently withdrew its approval under the influence of certain foreign Powers. The Bosnian Muslim leadership throughout the crisis and the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina has in essence been rejecting a great majority of peace proposals and has persisted in the war option. Moreover, by militarily provoking the Bosnian Serbs while accusing the international community of alleged inaction, it has sought to engage the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to wage the war on the Muslim side against the Serbs.

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The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has strongly condemned the practice of "ethnic cleansing" committed by any side as a crime against humanity. Throughout the crisis and the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnic cleansing perpetrated against one side invariably triggered off ethnic cleansing against the other. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is opposed to each and every instance of ethnic cleansing. Unfortunately, drastic examples of crimes committed against the Serbs have been largely ignored. For the sake of historical truth, it should be pointed out that the first brutal examples of ethnic cleansing were carried out in the Neretva valley in western Herzegovina, which is now virtually cleansed of Serbs. Historical monuments representing landmarks of Serbian civilization have been razed to the ground throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did all within its powers to have the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina accept the Vance-Owen plan.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has supported, and the Bosnian Serbs accepted, the so-called Owen-Stoltenberg plan, which actually replaced the Vance-Owen plan subsequently abandoned by its authors. That plan was also rejected by the Muslim side. It has invested all its influence with the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina that they accept the plan of action of the European Union based on the Juppé-Kinkel initiative, which they did.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia granted full support to the efforts of the Contact Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the searching for a peaceful solution within the framework of the "Geneva declaration".

The Yugoslav Government as well as the leaders of its two republics have publicly urged the Bosnian Serbs to accept the plan of the Contact Group as a way of enabling the resumption of the peace process. The Federal Government has asked the Bosnian Serb leadership to show its commitment towards peace and the peace process by taking an unequivocal positive stand on the Contact Group's proposal. In the choice between accepting a compromise peace or an escalation of the war, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has never hesitated to choose the option of peace. The sacrificing of peace was considered by the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to be leading to a new and even bigger disaster.

Therefore, further insistence on the collective punishment of the people of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia - coupled with the insistence of certain countries on the lifting of the arms embargo on Bosnia and Herzegovina - is an absurd policy. It would inevitably further inflame the conflict with unforeseeable consequences not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina but for the region as a whole, which cannot be the goal of the international community and those who are really in favour of a peaceful and comprehensive political settlement.

What is now really needed is the complete lifting of all sanctions, which the Security Council should consider as a matter of urgency. That would be the quickest and best way of obtaining a final political solution of the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia firmly believes in the ongoing peace process and appeals to the Contact Group to continue its work so that a final solution be reached as soon as possible, and one that would accommodate the vital interests of all three peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Any solution that would not be satisfactory to one of them could only further escalate the conflict. Any other option is fraught with risks with unforeseeable consequences, not only to the warring parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but to the international community as a whole.

Despite the fact that the international community has taken an unfounded negative stand towards the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will continue, as it has done so far, to make its utmost contribution to the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as to the resolution of all outstanding questions in the territory of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, deeply convinced that there is no alternative to peace.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 39.

(Signed) Dragomir DJOKIC
Ambassador
Chargé d'affaires a.i.
